CHAPTER V

*Personal is Political: Indira Gandhi’s Biographies*

A “woman” so closely tuned to the country and its people; so complex, so skilful, so far seeing, so concerned, so capable of an insightful listening, so moved by beauty; and yet, at times, so primeval, so obsessive, so brittle, even trivial – a “woman” who refused to be measured, who laid her own ground rule.

(Pupul Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi: A Biography* 372; emphasis added)

History will not speak about women. It will make women speak of it - that is the history the readers are aware of. The “woman” mentioned above is Indira Gandhi, born on November 19, 1917 into the politically influential Nehru family. Indira Gandhi, as a name according to some of the biographers and critics, mirrors an image of a frail and shy woman, representing the majority of Indian women, but became a great woman of international repute while passing through a hard grinding process over the years. She happened to break the orthodoxy and was able to ascend the pinnacle of political power even though she belonged to the then third world country and that too a male-dominated society.

Few world leaders, and fewer from the Third World, have been the subject of as many biographical studies in their lifetime as was India’s former Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi – a ‘woman’. Indira Gandhi’s life spanned over two-thirds of a century. Politics forms a backdrop to Indira Gandhi’s public and often private actions, as her life was part of the unfolding history of India, intricately woven with India’s past and future. In order to understand Indira as a subject of her biographers, at this point, it is necessary to know how the genre functions as a literary text.
Literary texts provide a powerful understanding of ways in which society works towards the images of both women and men, what mental conception of a woman a creative writer tends to have. Literature is said to be the reflection of society and a biographer plays a major role in the depiction of society in its truer sense. As a genre ‘Biography’ is an ideological account of a “life” which in turn feed back into everyday understandings of how “common lives” and “extraordinary lives” can be recognized. Biographers just like autobiographers are writers, albeit writers bound by a perceived duty to produce some kind of form, direct the reader’s interpretation of the subject, interpret, conclude. Biography is not the representation but the re-making, not the reconstruction but the construction, in the written form of a life.

A feminist and cultural political approach can offer special insights into the ways women are represented in the literary texts. This chapter studies the biographies of Indira Gandhi portrayed by four different biographers. The study examines the biographies on two levels, firstly, the effort, here is to place the biography within the cultural context and not a personal portrait of itself, reading for gender. Secondly, to examine within the framework of the Personal is Political, the personal struggle of a “woman” Indira Gandhi, her passage of right into the Indian male world, the political arena of Indian nation. The primary texts for the study are the biographies of Indira Gandhi written by Pupul Jayakar’s *Indira Gandhi: A Biography* (1992), Katherine Frank’s *Indira: The Life of Indira Gandhi* (2001), and Dom Moraes’s *Mrs. Gandhi* (1980) and Inder Malhotra’s *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography* (1991).

The biographers depict Indira Gandhi, the subject with disparity, encompassing Indira Gandhi’s personal and political life. Not, only different writers of biographies of the same subject disagree, but also the same biographer holds different opinions, different views, and different conclusions,
about their subject. Moreover, the differences between these apparently different biographies melt under the glare of scrutiny. The writer, male or female, as a biographer is central to each, uses approximately similar means of putting across an argument, making a case, telling a story; it is the ‘voice’ and its modulation that differs starkly. As a result biographical practice enables ‘a life’ to be written around a framework of interpretation decided by the biographer and not by the life itself. All the four biographers chosen for the study are members of a particular social, cultural and political milieu. Each biographer narrates the same experience in a different sense, language and perspective. This difference produces a view which is socially located and necessarily a partial one.

It’s a general overview that, everything in Indira Gandhi’s life appears to be “political”. To comprehend such a thought the first step is to distinguish that “politics” is not the sole preserve of professionals called politicians. On the contrary “everything is politics”, especially those things which claim or are claimed apolitical like those “truths” which great literature is said to embody, which still get labeled “universal”. Politics in this wider sense means power or rather power relations: who does what to whom and in whose interest.

In spite of being born into the most privileged Nehru family, Indira Gandhi grew up in utter loneliness, separation and uncertainty of future. Her incomplete education, her patriotic fervor, her very entry into political life was a political choice. If her marriage was her personal choice, as ill luck would have it, it ended up into a split; a target under direct influence of political sway leaving her no options, Indira was totally reluctant to enter into politics after her marriage. Yet she shot like comet to become a remarkable states woman. In short a penetrating search into the biographies reveals the private and public
side of the subject in pact by the personal intensity of expression on the part of the biographer.

This chapter brings a study of four biographies of Indira Gandhi, two written by women biographers, Pupul Jayakar’s *Indira Gandhi: A Biography* (1992) and Katherine Frank’s *Indira: The Life of Indira Gandhi* (2001), and two by male biographers, Dom Moraes’s *Mrs. Gandhi* (1980) and Inder Malhotra’s *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography* (1991). The focus of the chapter is on how the act of inscribing a biographical self too is embedded in gender politics. In other words, how the gender of the biographer influences his/her perception of Indira Gandhi as the biographer’s subject. In turn, how the ‘personal’ of the biographer reflects in his/her construction of Indira Gandhi’s *Personal and Political* self. How one gender turns the ‘subject into an object under’ microscope, while how the other gender looks at the same in kaleidoscopic manner. As a result how the portrayal of Indira Gandhi’s self differs.

**Indira Gandhi’s Biographies: Microscope/ Kaleidoscope:**

Pupul Jayakar’s *Indira Gandhi: A Biography* (1992) is not just a political biography. It seeks clues to Indira Gandhi’s life through the access to the many personalities that lay hidden within her. Pupul Jayakar, a friend and associate of Indira Gandhi wrote this biography with an impulse “to uncover and reveal Indira Gandhi’s thoughts and feelings, her hates and prejudices, her insights and her ignorance, and her loves and the emotional entanglements that generated actions. It is this alone that gives destiny to the material, enable Indira Gandhi to come alive. Unfortunately, we deify and worship our heroes and so destroy them.” (Pupul, ix). The biographer divulges that a keen association with the freedom struggle and the stalwarts of the independence movement had molded
Indira Gandhi’s life. In many ways Indira Gandhi was a reflection of her father’s mind.

Indira’s early years in England and her association with Feroze Gandhi’s left-wing friends, journalists and political thinkers had given her a radical conditioning. Her early upbringing and her father’s interests gave her a love of adventure, fearlessness, an inbuilt sense of secularism. Pupul Jayakar stresses that in spite of Indira’s early exposure to intellectuals and powerful activists, she had lived within the confines of society which hemmed her in, gave her little opportunity to reach out, meet people, explore the arts or investigate a life of the mind. Pupul further states:

She had her own refuges; her world of fantasy and an inner sanctuary where from childhood she could take shelter when threatened. Her early years in Allahabad, her sharing with her grandmother in seasonal festivals and her grandaunt’s tales, exposed her to living myth and ritual, that quickened the ground of her mind, made it rich and potent, but the seeds of that living energy were still dormant. They awaited germination. (136).

Many women seem prepared to accept social definitions of what they can or cannot do and are happy to find themselves in the destined tasks. This makes their choice political. Pupul Jayakar endeavors, to disentangle, the complexity of Indira Gandhi’s life as “a woman”.

As a female writer, her biography takes the form of psychological insight which as a result reveals the subject and not just the “whole picture”. In this process, Pupul Jayakar initiates to know certain essentials like to what extent Indira Gandhi’s childhood and adolescence mold her life. What made Indira Gandhi, at a tender age, to learn the power of silence? How real politics entered
her life, and unable to steer through the betrayal, isolation and loneliness and a mounting fear of the future created in her married life, why she felt an urgent need to follow her father’s footsteps and discover herself and mold herself as a “politician”.

Katherine Frank, already the author of three acclaimed biographies of women subjects, grapples to understand the original Iron Lady of world politics, Indira Gandhi by writing *Indira: The Life of Indira Gandhi*. The result is a detailed account of the life of Indira Gandhi, the mountain girl of Kashmir who rose to succeed her father, Jawaharlal Nehru, as prime minister of the world's largest democracy. In the first chapter, *Descent from Kashmir*, she states:

> Historical and political imperatives determined and shaped the lives of Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi. Both were handcuffed to history - Only death offered release. Neither feared death, but it was never far from their minds - the death of those they loved, of their dreams, of themselves. The mountains of Kashmir were sublimely indifferent to human life and death, untouched by far above the plains of human toil and struggle (Frank 12).

The conventional model of biography production is one which can be likened to the effect of a ‘microscope’: the more information about the subject you collect, the closer to ‘the truth’—the ‘whole picture’—you get. This need for ‘more information’ can take the form of amassing detail about the subject’s life and work, or the form of psychological insight which is seen to ‘reveal the subject’.

Nonetheless, Katherine Frank’s biography works as a microscope. Drawing on a variety of sources—including Jawaharlal's memoirs and interviews with those who knew Indira - the author reveals how Indira's professional and emotional relationships often intertwined, especially in regard to the men in her
life: her influential father, her husband, and her two sons - Rajiv and Sanjay. The first half of the narrative provides some intimate details of Indira's unconventional childhood in her paternal grandfather's Westernized home, the relationship between Kamala and Jawaharlal, Indira's early life far from happy, Kamala’s death, Indira marrying Feroze Gandhi who later humiliated her with his clashing politics and infidelities, until he died. Frank chronicles the triumphs and blunders of Indira's career in a detached voice.

Inder Malhotra’s *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography* as he states in the foreword: “the biography of Indira is also a history of India” (xi). In essence, the most telling and the instructive meaning of the ‘personal is political’ be gradually toppled to mean that the political, the social, the economic, and the cultural derive from our personal choices. All political phenomena arise from the accumulated personal choices of individuals, so that what needed to be addressed to win better circumstances were primarily people’s personal choices. The slogan *personal is political* rightly explains: “Indira is India and India is Indira”. Because Indira Gandhi’s personal life was the political destiny of India. As the correspondent for Britain’s Guardian and as the editor of TOI, Delhi, Inder Malhotra knew Indira Gandhi.

His publications include *Dynasties of India and Beyond* (2003) and a fresh biography on Indira Gandhi titled *Indira Gandhi* (2006). His impulse is to offer a portraiture of Indira Gandhi as objective as humanly possible. He illustrates Indira’s childhood in the Nehru family and its grave influence on her maturing process. With discernment he also examines how Indira Gandhi’s career in politics was affected by her father Jawaharlal Nehru, and her marriage. He calls the Emergency “her worst and most catastrophic mistake, indeed her cardinal sin” (97). In a riveting portrait, he assesses both strengths and flaws of the subject, which reflects authority. But, the afresh, second biography written
by Inder Malhotra, as the author of the same subject, *Indira Gandhi* (2006) establishes the fact that, any biographer’s view is a socially located and necessarily a partial one.

Dom Moreas, a poet by instinct and journalist by profession set out to capture Mrs. Gandhi’s elusive personality by writing the biography *Mrs. Gandhi*. As an onlooker he simultaneously portrays India in all its variety, with a poet’s eye. He traces the Nehru family’s involvement with the Indian nationalist movement, and describes how Indira Gandhi’s life was affected. Very aptly, the author opens with the lines “INDIA, ROUGHLY SPEAKING, is shaped like a carrot, with a tuft at the top…. Here they became the forefathers of the race that now inhabits northern India, a race fair of skin and hedonistic of habit” (Moreas 3; capital as in the original).

Dom Moreas gives a very informative and well – written portrayal of Indira Gandhi’s childhood, commitment to Congress party, her marriage which had to take second place to political necessity. He presents a devastating picture of the state of Indian politics, Indira’s solo steps in the political arena, as the fighting politician, as the mother – figure of humble peasants. His narration of the facts sounds like a chronicler; the motif and metaphors do not? Constitute its unity.

Dom Moreas’s approach is more of a Modern Biographer, the term that Virginia Woolf defines, who sees the central task, of reconstruction on paper of the fundamental subject, from a myriad of contemporary shifting and conflicting views of this event, that relationship, this activity and that achievement. The close reading hints at his stereotyped thinking about women. As a biographer Dom Moreas participates in the act of telling a life, but fails to examine the subject, in search of “the truth” – the “whole picture”.
Indira’s personal life is a very important part of *Dear to Behold: An Intimate Portrait of Indira Gandhi* (1969) by Krishna Nehru Hutheesing. Indira’s aunt & Nehru’s younger sister, Krishna Hutheesing was only ten years older than Indira, and her companion and confidante over the years. Krishna Hutheesing was a natural raconteur who lectured widely, making many appearances in the United States. Among her books are *With No Regrets* and, with Alden Hatch, *We Nehrus*. Indira’s personal life is a very important part of *Dear to Behold* – Indira’s feelings for her mother and father, her student days at Oxford and at Rabindranath Tagore’s university, her marriage to Feroze Gandhi and their separate careers, her widowhood, her role as mother and keeper-of-the-house. Interwoven with this personal life is the story of her growing importance as a political figure.

Krishna Hutheesing portrays Indira’s growing, as if episodic, till she is elected as the Prime Minister, the first woman in history to head a nation of almost half a billion people. The book posthumously got published after Krishna Hutheesing’s death.

Another biography falling in the group of relatives, writing life history on Indira Gandhi is the book titled *INDIRA GANDHI: The Road to Power* (1982) partly published in a different form in India as *Indira Gandhi’s Emergence and Style* – written by Nayantara Sahgal, niece of Jawaharlal Nehru, daughter of Vijayalakshmi Pandit and then the cousin to Indira Gandhi. In the very preface to the book the author sets the ‘voice’ by stating:

*I have been asked how I could be a critic of one so closely related to me, in a country where “family” commands unquestioning allegiance. A family in power is an even more formidable bastion, and in Indian culture the loyalty of those who belong to it is an effortless assumption..My admiration for my uncle, Jawaharlal*
Nehru, had little to do with the fact that I happened to be of his flesh and blood. To my mind, he handled a titanic task with courage, grace, and the last ounce of effort wrung from each day’s labor. He demonstrated that, in India, politics has to be art of the impossible, requiring the dedication to sustain and fuel the “impossible” venture of an open society and government by consent in our conditions...when I started this book, it had a symbolic importance for me as a duty on behalf of the voices the Emergency had silenced in my country, as a duty also to values of the free society that Nehru had devoted his life to building. Time has made issues relating to our democracy more relevant and more vulnerable (xv).

Nayantara Sahgal’s prime concern with her biographical subject is the portrayal of Indira Gandhi as a person (woman), her emergence onto the scene of political and public endeavor and her role as a ‘Woman Prime Minister’.

**Multiple Images of Indira Gandhi: Wo[men] Biographers:**

Different images of Indira Gandhi are formed by different biographers. This again relies on their being socially – located person, one who is sexed, race, classed. The resultant notion is even in a biography, facts do get fictionalized. While assorted depictions and interpretations are made by the biographers. An attempt in deconstructing the biographies, from a feminist point of view, would provide evidence that various factors interplay in subjecting a ‘woman’ to subordination.

The task is to examine if the biographies of Indira Gandhi by both male and female writers construct the “white light of fact” against the colored light which is “double faced” and is open to more than one interpretation. The details of Indira Gandhi’s political achievements as portrayed in the biographies are not the focus of discussion here, but locating how she was able to tap her potential while passing through the hard grinding process of life, is the task.
Primarily the attempt is to perceive the distinction between feminine and masculine writing in the biographies of Indira Gandhi. The details are related to the childhood, the married life and other phases of Indira Gandhi’s life as portrayed by the biographers.

While agreeing on the point that Indira Gandhi was a lonely child, the biographers attribute her loneliness and desperation to her mother’s constant illness, and the disappearance of her father’s protective presence and the constant uncertainty of her family. Pupul Jayakar’s narration of Indira as a young child reveals the inner strength shown by her against her loneliness. Pupul sympathizes with Indira’s keeping aloof as a child claiming that as a child she was unsure of herself. Pupul could understand Indira’s pride which made, an outer display of grief unthinkable and the lack of a room of her own where she could cry, be alone, or be silent which only enhanced her loneliness. Pupul states “she would seek to be alone…. looked upon trees…. loved climbing…. in a little place which was my own…. it was in her room that she learnt to internalize her fears” (16).

Pupul describes Indira as a kid who loved to fantasize as Alice, as Joan of Arc or as Rani of Jhansi. According to her, Indira was able to escape the turmoil as well as the anxiety and tensions that lay dormant in the empty house whenever she had closed herself in her room. After Kamala Nehru’s death, highly sensitized by her separation and sorrow, she needed her father’s companionship and his total attention. To her astonishment she found her father’s attention was fragmented.

Indira suddenly found that a new relationship filled Nehru’s consciousness. Indira was not prepared to share her father with another human
being, and halted midway in her confidences. Another doorway was closed. A psychological turmoil as Pupul notes:

Indira was also very young and self – consciously shy. It was not easy to separate the elements out of which her self – consciousness diffidence was compounded. Certainly she did not find words easy and froze in the articulate and argumentative company of her fellow – students. But more than that as a young girl she and her mother had felt cruelty excluded by the brilliance and the good looks that set her father and Vijayalakshmi apart in the admiring glances of the people around her in Allahabad. She had been driven into herself by feeling of inferiority, feeling which remained with her all her life. (93–94; emphasis added)

To Inder Malhotra, Indira’s games were all political and he attributes her loneliness and desolation to her being the only child and doubted if she would ever outgrow her childhood fantasies. He directs that “Her loneliness, lack of an even tenor of life and her vision of the great tasks expected of her appear to have developed in her a feeling of great vulnerability and inadequacy” (37). To him, Indira Gandhi always guarded her privacy most zealously and this trait of being unable to confide her thoughts to anyone remained with her.

So, he states very directly: “Indira was a troubled child almost from the time when she became conscious of the world around her. This was so because of the harsh treatment her mother, Kamala, was receiving at the hands of the Nehru women, especially Vijayalakshmi, the elder of Jawaharlal’s two sisters” (4). Inder Malhotra, does not hit at any of the other possibility for Indira Gandhi being such a reserve. He concludes that Indira Gandhi’s inadequacies are the root cause of her personality traits, and no other external force working.

Katherine appreciates Indira Gandhi, as an intelligent child, who was rarely assertive or ‘difficult’; remarkably ‘good girl’ – docile, quiet,
undemanding and obedient. Katherine Frank, too, projects the mental landscape of Indira and says:

Like all children, Indira spent a great deal of her time in a fantasy world of play. Much has been made of her childhood games the rousing political speeches to assembled Anand Bhawan servants, the freedom fighter dolls, the mock lathi (baton) – charges and pretend police raids – as if they forshadowed her later political career. But far from being prophetic, Indira was simply playing at being an adult and this is what she saw those around her doing. (28; emphasis added)

Dom Moreas, perceives Indira Gandhi’s shyness, not as an attribute but more as a disguise. He asserts:

Indira had been close to her mother, closer, indeed than to anyone else, with her father so often away. She had watched while her mother was hurt by relatives at home: more recently she had watched Kamala endure her physical calvary. After Kamala’s death, Indira withdrew, with a few exceptions, from close personal relationships: perhaps because she did not want to be badly hurt once more. She had always been shy, but her shyness was to harden into an aloofness and remoteness of manner which often prevented her from showing warmth to others (70).

Romantic love was one such myth that appears to have trapped Indira Gandhi underline all the biographers. Flouting the age-old tradition, Indira Gandhi had opted for an intercommunity and inter-religious marriage. One can perceive from the narrations that like any young girl, she too lived in the expectation that the most important thing in one’s life was to marry the right man of her choice and live with him happily ever after. In spite of being fortunate enough to be brought up in a family that was pivotal in her development of self-esteem, a self-concept, self-confident and optimistic attitude to life, she seems to internalize the role of a wife and mother as an accurate reflection of what it means to be woman. In *My Truth* which recorded
much of Indira Gandhi’s life in her own words, she states “One of the reasons I got married was that I was determined to have children” (46).

Power is the issue in the politics of literature, as it is in the politics of anything else. To exclude from a literature that claims to define one’s identity is to experience a peculiar form of powerlessness and to be universal is to be ‘not female.’ To create a new understanding through ‘Gynocentric’ analysis is to make possible anew effect of that literature on women.

Due to their andocentric thinking, male writers always portray a “woman” as emotionally and intellectually stunted by her life as a “woman” and by their prevailing conceptions of true womanhood. Often, men write with their preconceived notions on women. Their narrations take away the confessional element, filter the emotions and water them done. Few such recounting from the biographies of the two male writers establishes the notion that for women Personal is Political. They lead the female readers into hardened stereotypes and there is no doubt that these stereotypes are a powerful influence on them.

Resting the entire blame on Indira Gandhi’s failure to be a dutiful wife to Feroze, Inder Malhotra writes down:

Being an extrovert, unlike his taciturn wife, he did not hesitate to give vent to his hurt and resentment over being a grass widower while his wife and two sons lived in style in the Prime Minister’s house…. sporadic reunions could hardly be a substitute for normal family life… she felt that her duty was to her father… incipient marital discord… her father’s needs took precedence over everything else. Devotion to Daddy compensation for a disintegrating marriage. (60; emphasis added)
It needs to be noted that Inder Malhotra, the same author wrote afresh biography, titled *Indira Gandhi* published in 2006, in which the revised version of the same speaks afresh:

Burdened with awesome responsibilities, amidst a developing holocaust, Nehru needed Indira more than ever before to keep house for him, act his official hostess and generally look after him…. This she did because of her “sense of duty”. She knew that her father had a “real need” for her help. This very thought of Papu leading a “lonesome life, helped only by civil servants and domestic retainers” appalled her. (Malhotra 18; emphasis added)

Dom Moreas inappropriately comments:

Nehru was not himself a man who could live alone. Without a wife, he needed a daughter to look after him since it was not proper, in the terms of the culture in which he lived against his will, for him to remarry. He therefore sent for Indira to come to Allahabad, every month. She became a sort of housekeeper to Nehru as well as Feroze. (83; emphasis added) Later, again he announces that: Indira may have been, in a sense, wedded to her father, but Feroze was still her husband. (85; emphasis added)

On the same point Pupul Jayakar, illustrates her talk with Indira:

I asked her whether Feroze was upset when she came to live with her father? Indira replied it was Feroze’s idea. My father asked me to set up his house. I discussed it with Feroze and he said go. But by then he already had an eye on someone. After 1950 Feroze was a Member of Parliament and lived in Delhi. The situation seemed to have become more complicated. Feroze had made her feel very possessive. He said to me, “Don’t strangle me with you love”. It was very difficult, she said to strike a balance in our relationship. (480; emphasis added)

Reading these bits in line make sense that facts like fictions are artifact of their time, place, author, author’s frame of mind, reader. The version differs at the same time the reason to write two biographies on the same biographical subject, here Indira Gandhi differs in the case of Inder Malhotra.
According to Inder Malhotra, there is nothing startlingly new to add to what has already been stated in the humungous outpouring of words on Indira Gandhi, in his earlier biography *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography*. But still he states:

Indira’s countrymen have begun to realize and to say that the yeoman services she rendered to India far exceeded the undoubted mistakes and blunders she committed. Her image is once again burnished and bright although there are still diehard critics ready to denounce her at the drop of a hat. But surely a change of this magnitude and significance is a powerful reason why serious students of this country and contemporary history should look at the life and leadership of Indira Gandhi. This indeed is my reason to write a fresh biography of hers, viewing her in the perspective of 21 years that have elapsed since she passed into history. To maintain the highest standards of objectivity and fairness remains my sheet anchor. (*Indira* xv)

It definitely sounds like Inder Malhotra advocates a new approach to his rewriting of afresh, rather a “New Biography” on Indira Gandhi. For Woolf, The “New Biography” as a form is a testimony and an oracle, constructing the white light of fact against the colored light of biography, revealing that facts are also double faced and open to more than one interpretation. The notion that gender is not innate but is socially constructed and is made and remade by the society gets strengthened with changing times too.

Misrepresentation of women by men sustains and justifies women’s less important position. Simon de Beauvoir’s classic feminist study in *The Second Sex* considers the near – universal inequality between the sexes, across cultures and through history, to find an explanation of why women are invariably ‘the second sex’. The famous phrase that opens the second volume of the *The Second Sex*, ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’, means that there is
no pre–established female nature or essence; to the ways in which gender identity is experienced (Ursula 51).

The terms ‘man’ and ‘woman’, ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are not used symmetrically: the term ‘man’ is always ‘positive’ standing for the norm, for humanity in general; ‘woman’ is the secondary term, what is ‘other’ to the norm, and so ‘woman’ does not have a positive meaning in its own right, but is defined in relation to ‘man’ – as what man is not. Thus women are frail not strong, emotional not rational. In other words, by seeing women as other to themselves, men can read into femininity whatever qualities are needed to construct their sense of the masculine.

As Inder Malhotra remarks, “Independence also meant greater burdens on her slender shoulders” (58). Here, very explicitly, he means ‘power’ and ‘power relations’ very explicitly. The writer seems to have universalized the truth that Indira Gandhi as she is frail and weak is unfit for a political career. In a similar tone Dom Moraes speaks:

Mrs. Gandhi’s public activity had hitherto been fairly limited. She was frequently in the public eye, but this was only because she was the daughter of Nehru. She did, however, sit on several committees, mainly to do with child welfare and education. Her image was that of a very feminine woman whose main interests were in the household. This image was magnified by her rather shy and nervous behavior…. Her entire reputation was one of shyness, of withdrawal, a sort of frightened fawn. (101; emphasis added).

The author in biography writing is an almost invariably absent character, but surely an active controlling power. The power, man has assumed the position of universal subject, and woman is positioned as relative ‘Other’, or object to male consciousness. Again to continue, both men and women perpetuate patriarchy. Patriarchy is not simply another way of saying “men.” A
society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified, and male centered. It is also organized around an obsession with control and involves as one of its key aspects the oppression of women. Nayantara Sahgal in *INDIRA GANDHI: Her Road to Power* illustrates Indira Gandhi’s road to personal identity and personal power of a “woman”, As she states:

Life remained for her a stark and narrow weave, unlike the many – textured fabric of her father’s personality and growth. The vital human difference between them made for very different potential values and expression. Nehru’s temperament was the fireside at which many warmed their hands, took strength, and went on their way to personhood, more confident for the encounter with him. Indira’s was the flame – lone, dependent on shelter for its glow and survival, leaving its surroundings dark. (240; emphasis added).

Katherine Frank, in a thought of detachment writes:

Rumours persisted regarding the Prime Minister’s love affairs, despite her lack of time and privacy, even if she had the inclination. Indira’s yoga teacher, the charismatic, handsome holy man, Dhirendra Brahmachari, was still a frequent visitor to the house. He was the only man to see Indira alone in her room …and he was the only male with whom she could have had a relationship during this period. (357; emphasis added).

In the chapter ‘The Farthest Horizon’, Dom Moreas speaks his mind, to hide overt sexism under the cover of “political correctness”. In a very subtle manner he says:

Gossip is rife in India. It spreads not only from the lipsticked mouths of society ladies, but from the less attractive lips of politicians. ….Gossip about Mrs. Gandhi has always been prevalent, and much of it has had to do with her sex life after she and Feroze embarked upon their curious separation. Now I personally, and many other people, think her an attractive woman, but I very much doubt that she thinks so. Only attractive women
who are physically conscious of themselves have affairs? It wasn’t like that at all ….the relationship between Feroze and his wife may not have been exactly that at least after 1952, of a normal couple, but I believe that until Feroze died, Mrs. Gandhi had loved him. (98; emphasis added).

Often, the sheer scope and the twists and turns of a complex life, as a subject formulate the task of a biographer daunting. The variety and the obvious unpredictability of public life makes it impossible for any biographer to be totally sympathetic to the subject’s every move. Both if the author symbolizes disrupting authority, and if the author is a fabricator, then the reader can unpick, re-stitch and re-fashion.

Women are perceived solely as objects of possession, and their virtues equated with male honor, they are never known for themselves. Confused by their own stereotyped thinking about women, men do not read them in a true light. It must be acknowledged that sexism in language has undergone a great change because of feminist theory which has forced sexism to become more indirect or subtle, and which perhaps has driven overt sexism underground and as a result it is less common for overt to appear within tests; yet this is not to say that sexism does not exert a pressure on the text itself.

While narrating her subject, Indira Gandhi, in the biography Pupul Jayakar’s focus is on the processes, rather than the product. As she writes down her talk, in person regarding the stories that circulated in the gossip circles of Delhi, that Indira had relationships with other men; when she was living with her father’s house. Pupul, herself heard the stories, some spread by her close relatives. She knew Indira well, saw her frequently and felt that these rumors had no basis in fact. Indira, as she knew her was delighted in being admired, liked to be surrounded by good – looking, witty, intelligent men, but the sexual
side of her was underdeveloped. Pupul even dared to confirm once with Indira and the reply was:

A part of the problem is, she (Indira) said, ‘that I do not behave like a woman. The lack of sex in me partly accounts for this. When I think of how other women behave, I realize that it is a lack of sex and with it a lack of woman’s wiles, on which most men base their views of me. (479)

In one more such interaction with Pupul Jayakar, Indira Gandhi disclosed certain realities of her life. Pupul writes:

She did not think she could have married anybody except Feroze, even though they fought “like wildcats” and he had asked her for a divorce. She recalled the occasion – how she had been very upset at the time, had resisted and wept so that her face was swollen. ‘Finally I said to Feroze that if “it (divorce) is what you want, all right”.’ He turned and said: “Do you mean to say that you will let me go like that?” Then I lost my temper and said, “This is the limit. I say – we have our differences, but there are the children; and you say is – separation. What I say – all right, you blame me.” Feroze was very attached to me, but he listened to what other people said. You know, Pupul, I have never carried on with anybody. But they would spread all kinds of stories and Feroze would believe them. I said to him, “How can I prove anything? I hardly go out except with my father and you, and when I am touring I always have someone with me.” (479-480; emphasis added)

Dom Moraes wittingly uses the phrase “One of more ‘enigmatic’ experiences came to her face then, as usual…” (116). The term enigma seems to be a euphemism for a puzzled person, one of the few negative assessments offered in the text operating at a stereotypical level. Working within patriarchal norms, a woman is taxed beyond her strength to combat envy, malice and uncharitable forces operating on her and therefore poses as an ‘enigma’ to the male world.

As Dom Moreas confirms his view:
She is a remarkable woman as it is, probably the most remarkable woman I have ever met: but she could have been equally remarkable as a completely different sort of woman, if her childhood, her adolescent loneliness, her broken marriage, and her long watch over the dying days of her father, could be replaced and made into one….Mrs. Gandhi had known and suffered as a child the experience of not being accepted into her own family. Then the cruising years came, when she floated under the wing of her father…Indira was able to stay in the shadows and was anxious to remain there. She was dependent on her father in a psychological sense, that is to say she was protected by him. At the same time she had the feeling that she protected him, alleviating his tiredness, keeping bores off his back, feeding him properly…Then came the years of power, when she fought, manipulated and overrode the people around her..In a sense as a psychological study, she was not unique, but certainly rare. (313).

As per Dom Moreas’s portrayal, the story of Indira Gandhi, at its elemental level, is the story of a ‘woman’ who was born to great privilege, but was not destined to enjoy it. A sad, lonely, sickly childhood with both the parents often in the jail, a mother who died when she was eighteen, a philandering husband, a demanding father and finally a rash son and her personal hopes and desires continually subsumed by the historical and political imperatives of her country. Indira, therefore, is an enigma because she resisted all the stereotypism and male ideologies around.

Krishna Hutheesing divulges a genuine picture of Indira Gandhi in the last chapter “Let My Country Awake”. As the opening lines read:

WHAT IS INDIRA LIKE as a person? What is she like as a mother? Does she, and will she, make the kind of Prime Minister of India needs?....There are those who describe Indira as cold, aloof, arrogant, snobbish. Actually, she is warm and friendly. The shyness of her childhood days, stemming from loneliness, still persists with strangers, and this might make her seem aloof. Some foreign writers have ascribed the supposed arrogance of the Nehru clan to our being Brahmins…When Indira first became Prime Minister, she faced a responsibility far heavier than either her
father or Lal Bahadur Shastri had to face...An irresponsible opposition saw an opportunity for capturing power and incited the people to disrupt law and order...Entering the parliament for the first time, she was inexperienced in parliamentary procedures...We are a people of common clay, with weaknesses and strengths. Indira may be, as critics have said, weak in some ways, but she has courage and determination. In her veins flows the blood of her father and grandfather, who were dedicated to the cause of India, to the great ideals which have grown out of the long history of our land (204-208; as in the original).

Nayantara Sahgal begins the first chapter by asserting that Indira Gandhi’s emergence onto the scene of political and public endeavor took place during a period of marital strain and difficulty, and Nehru welcomed her increasing involvement in the party, both as the natural outcome of her background and as therapy for her troubled domestic life. She further states:

In 1964 she was still comparatively unnoticed in her own right, and not seriously considered as a candidate for the succession to Nehru. She had had no training in a profession and no experience in government. Though her presence on the working committee indicated high status in party, she had worked for the organization behind the scenes, and of choice remained in the background. A mother, occupied with caring for her two sons, she was devoted and imaginative about their upbringing, always torn between domestic and public responsibilities. She correctly described herself as a “private” person, so private indeed that no one knew her intimately. Her griefs were well-sheltered, her joys restrained. There was almost a pathos about her personality for those who tried to break through to it. It was a personality that would not step out. (4)

Nayantara Sahgal asserts that Indira Gandhi was not a major political personality but after Nehru’s death, she had shown signs of temperament and preference in political matters. Nayantara represent Indira Gandhi in view of that mindset, as she states:
She had been an observer, albeit close to the fount of power, during her father’s lifetime. The party presidency, like her earlier appointment to the working committee and its subsidiary bodies, had been bestowed on “Nehru’s daughter”; these were not positions she had earned through the rough apprenticeship of state politics with their numerous considerations of region, faction, and caste. She had not had to work her way up through the vast amorphous organization, or show outstanding talent, in order to be singled out. And she had shown no desire to stand out as a political or public personality. Her predominant image was one of retreat and extreme reserve. The country knew her as her father’s companion and mother of two boys (6).

**Multiple Masculinités: Impact on Indira Gandhi:**

The present section is an attempt to look at relations within a gender, to understand the contours of male worlds, and formation of masculinities within specific social contexts of work, status and community relationships, with the ways in which masculinities not only reflect these relationships, but are themselves the products of varied attempts to deal with and control social and spatial texts. Although it is now commonplace to recognize that gender is about relationship between women and men, it was not until the 1980s that these relationships became the more explicit object of study; and the focus shifted women to their relationships with men, construction of patriarchy, dynamics of intra-household relations, and issues of power and subordination.

According to the new found realism, the *Personal is Political*. The family is especially political. The most intimate locus of personal relations grounded in hierarchy and domination requires learning. The insight enables women to recognize that their personal unhappiness has political or social roots. The biographical studies assist in locating the struggles of being a “woman”, here Indira Gandhi and the role played by the history and culture in shaping her life.
The biographies describe Indira Gandhi’s grandfather, Motilal Nehru as an astute and successful lawyer and one of the wealthiest and most socially prominent citizens in the town. He lived with his family in a huge forty-two-room mansion called, Anand Bhawan. Power is the crucial factor in hegemonic masculinity and it is a point that Motilal was a patriarchal figure at home. Motilal ruled the household with an abundance of love but permitted no challenge to his authority. Motilal was both a dominating personality and a patriarch at home with an angry temper and imperious in nature, yet his love and concern for his grand daughter, was a shaping force in the development of Indira’s personality.

Krishna Hutheesing in the chapter “A Goodly Heritage” states: “Father presided over his household as a benevolent, wise, generous, strict, inflexibly obeyed master….we were brought up under rigorous discipline – I was sent off to bed punctually at seven, without the privilege of being present at Father’s evening arrival”(28). But for Indira, Krishna Hutheesing stresses, things were different, she states:

The rigid discipline that formerly had regulated the lives of the Nehru children yielded to a permissive freedom. Indira was growing up without orders from a governess. No fixed bedtime for her. A serious, solemn child, she walked around freely to listen with curiosity to grown-ups who were to have a vital role in the history of India. She took in a great deal of what was happening. Father was very proud of his grandchild and made much of her. He showed her off to all visitors (35).

Inder Malhotra’s biography records what Krishna Hutheesing, the younger daughter of Motilal had to say of her father: “that his imperious temper seemed to have passed on to his descendants” (19). Inder Malhotra feels that her grand father had a greater impact on Indira than her father, whose influence came much later. Her grandfather pampered and spoiled his grand child by
meeting her every wish and whim. Pupul Jayakar assumes that Indira’s entrance into the world of politics began at a tender age on the lap of her grandfather. According to Frank, Motilal Nehru showed his penchant for western ways and became an ardent Anglophile and lived like an English aristocrat, he remained deeply traditional when it came to the choice of his son’s career and wife. He was a male head of his household who spoke for and represented his dependants, whether wife, children or servants. This male supremacy set a notion of hierarchical rule and coercive authority and – formed, a foundation on which sexist ideology was based. Perhaps this male domination made Indira the infant to grow into a shy and introvert child later.

The biographers affirm that Jawaharlal never made a protest with the choice of his father. This dependant son drifted and led a ‘soft and pointless existence’; displaying expensive habits and exceeded ‘the handsome allowance’ that Motilal gave him. Nehru was Indian colonial elite who had to defend himself against the British, who constructed themselves as dyadic opposites, particularly around the categories of gender, age and race. As colonized, most men in the colonial India were controlled and dominated. At the same time they were fed a fantasy diet of male supremacy and power. Yet they could not rebel against the economic order and make revolution. The household of Nehru experienced the same repression of colonization of the British as with any other family during the colonial period, and in turn the men sought emancipation of their manhood/masculinity on the domestic front by exhibiting their authority which was suppressed in the outside world.

The domestic environment at Anand Bhawan, therefore, was the center of explosive tensions and women were the targets. The gentry and aspiring upper middle class dispatched their sons to the harsh environment of the boarding school, as it happened with Nehru, to inculcate the qualities of self-reliance and
determination. This was the imperial masculinity that the women had to combat with in Motilal’s household. Nehru’s patriarchal attitude in the interest of protection was seen as a gesture of care, of his “love” for Indira and his concern for her future.

The clash of masculinities between men also brought a lot of stiffness and tensions at home. As per the description of the biographers, Motilal was a liberal and a member of the National Indian Congress; politics at that time was geared to pageantry and rhetoric, with little contact between Congress and the pageantry, laborers or lower castes. Gandhiji’s call for Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act electrified the country and fired the imagination of tens of thousands of young men. Jawaharlal was among the most ardent converts to the new methodology and anxious to jump into the fray without a moment’s delay. This brought him into a head-on collision with his father – Motilal viewed Satyagraha as nothing short of “midsummer madness” (Pupul 29).

Motilal’s reluctance to agree with Gandhiji brought a conflict in the family that could not be solved by the family members. Krishna Hutheesing jots down the whole scene live in the chapter “Mahatma Gandhi Comes to Change Our Lives”. She states:

Father could not believe any good came out of a few people going to jail. The arguments between him and Jawahar put our peaceful home in a turmoil. But Father, ever resourceful, thought up a way out of the predicament: he invited Gandhi to Anand Bhawan….In long talks, Father and Gandhiji put forth their respective views on how to arrive at a solution of India’s problems. But since Father’s original purpose in inviting Gandhi was based on a desire to bring out cogent reasons why Jawahar should refrain from joining the Satyagraha Sabha, their exchange of ideas finally centered on Jawahar. To Gandhiji it was apparent that friction between a father and son who loved each other deeply was at stake, and he
acquiesced in Father’s plea to counsel Jawahar not to make an immediate decision (32).

However the conflict was settled simply and speedily by a decisive event known to history as the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre and rightly regarded as the most infamous atrocity of the British Raj in India. It brought a sudden decision in Motilal to give up his fabulous legal practice and luxurious lifestyle.

Indira later in her life inherited this quality of her grandfather, relinquishing the most precious at the time of country’s need - from a life of luxury, leisure and affluence to years of austerity.

In her incomplete autobiography *My Truth*, Indira Gandhi states, “Because of the political struggle, my own childhood was an abnormal one, full of loneliness and insecurity. That is why I was determined to devote full time to my children. A child’s need of his mother’s love and care is an urgent and fundamental one as that of a plant for sunshine and water” (48). Indira Gandhi never had a strong mother figure or maternal presence in her life. Having lost her mother at an early age left her with a void that was filled by Nehru; she literally was raised and groomed by her father. Her view to the outside world was through the eyes of her father. Pupul writes “For Indira it was a grim homecoming. With her grandmother dead – Anand Bhawan the residence of her aunt Vijayalakshmi, and her father engrossed in political work – the house ceased to provide a meaningful context for a sick young woman entering adulthood, without any sense of individual achievement.” (99)

Love and patriarchy have become so interwined in this society that many people, especially women, fear that eliminating patriarchy will lead to the loss of love. Not just loss of love, but the sense of loss of control. Patriarchy is synonymous to control, discipline, and order in the household. Women are
encouraged to internalize the idea that the birth of a son should be heralded and lament the arrival of a daughter. While Indira’s family was not orthodox enough to consider the birth of a girl child a misfortune, it did regard the male child a privilege and a necessity. This is very much evident, for at the time of Indira’s birth:

Pupul Jayakar states “Motilal, an anxious Jawaharlal, Vijayalakshmi Pandit and probably a host of uncles and cousins had gathered on the veranda to await the birth of the son they were certain would be born to Jawahar…. Jawaharlal determined not to show his excitement, refused to comment” (10). Katherine Frank states “Hua (it happened)” “Baccha hua?” repeated Motilal, knowing full well that his wife used the neutral pronoun because she could not bring herself to say that a female child was born (14). Inder Malhotra writes that, Jawaharlal’s mother Swaroop Rani, gave voice to their and her own voice as well to the deep-seated sentiment of the male dominated Indian society when she burst out: “It should have been a son.”(26). Krishna Hutheesing notes:

My mother blurted out, “Oh, but it should have been a boy.” She had wanted a son for her only son, and the womanfolk around her pulled long faces in sympathy with her. Father, irritated at her show of disappointment, chided her: “You must not say such a thing, or even think it. Have we made any difference between our son and daughters in their upbringing? Do you not love them equally? This daughter of Jawahar, for all you know, may prove better than a thousand sons.” While he stamped away angrily, she nodded silently, somewhat subdued by her husband’s reproof (19).

The masculine desire for a male child itself put the masculinity in play in Indira Gandhi’s family. In the absence of a male child, Indira Gandhi was shaped into being a politician by her grandfather as well as by her father who became the shaping forces in her personal and political life in her future. An extra burden of confronting the layers of colonial and oriental masculinities
from her grandfather’s home brought an overload of these in her personal life and a burdensome inheritance in her childhood, in fact, right through her life. Nehru groomed Indira to become more committed, decisive and independent, as one would generally do to a son. Pupul writes: “Intent on instilling courage in Indira, the parents would let her walk alone after dinner up the stairs and along a long veranda to her room. On the dimly lit stairs Indira would imagine shadows lurking in the garden, unspeakable things waiting. There would be no light in her room and she would have to stand on a stool to reach the light switch” (15). Pupul further writes: “Indira was a thin, long-legged gawky child, always dressed like her father in a white handspun Kurta and Pajama with a Gandhi cap worn at a slant. She was nimble and could climb trees with ease. She was raised as a boy from her childhood” (22).

Katherine Frank states Jawaharlal Nehru was her most gifted and enthusiastic tutor. He regarded his daughter to become more independent and undoubting. One of the most revealing and engaging works of his to enlighten his daughter is “Glimpses of World History’ with letters from Central prison of Naini, headed for Indira Priyadarshini on her thirteenth birthday. Nehru conceived of Glimpses as a gift or offering to Indira – “a present” as he says ‘of the mind and the spirit’. In his opening letter Nehru invokes Joan of Arc, reminds Indira that she was born the same month that Lenin started the Russian Revolution, and speaks of the revolution Gandhi was inspiring and leading in India. He, thus, endorses Thomas Carlyle’s “heroic” view of history- the idea that history consists of the deeds of great men. Glimpses, in fact, contain a pantheon of heroes: Socrates, Ashoka, Akbar, Alexander the Great, Garibaldi, Bismarck, Hitler and Franklin Roosevelt, among others. (65)

Being the only child, her father’s over-expectation of her right from her infancy exerted a stress in her to prove her mettle. Inder Malhotra analyses:
Her loneliness, lack of an even tenor of her life and her vision of the great tasks expected of her appear to have developed in her a feeling of great **vulnerability** and **inadequacy**, goading her to develop a dual defensive mechanism. On the one hand, despite her painful shyness, she strove to excel in whatever she had to do. On the other, she enveloped herself in impenetrable reserve. She was unable to confide her thoughts and emotions to anyone except a very few and she guarded her privacy most zealously. All these traits were to remain with even when she filled for close to two decades a position of very high visibility in a nation that is the second largest in the world and perhaps the most inquisitive. (37, 38; emphasis added)

Indira Gandhi manifested quiet leadership traits early on - silent resolve to follow her father’s dreams, containing emotions of impenetrable reserve. For Indira combating the masculinity of her father seemed to be the most difficult task. Dom Moreas in the chapter *A First Encounter* writes, Indira Gandhi dreamt of herself as ‘Joan of Arc’, and had a fire which has always burnt in her but which nobody saw (or felt) for years. (113)

According to Katherine Frank, Nehru’s dream for his daughter, in keeping with his own expansive temper, occupied a large canvas – not to serve India in a restricted field but to presume to enter the wide expanse of Indian community. This was the mystical tradition of the family to which Jawaharlal held the door open for his daughter to enter. This was the role for which he had prepared her since her childhood, when he wrote history of the world for her in letters from jail.

Indira bent her will and her intellect to living out her father’s dream. She took the first steps toward a good education by accepting a place at the Badminton School in Bristol, in preparation for Oxford. This too was part of her father’s dream: the western education, which should free her from her narrow self. (Pupul 61)
Pupul writes in detail about how Indira faced it very difficult to convince her father in her decision of her choice of her life partner. Nehru undermined Indira’s supreme confidence and her conviction that she must shape her own future – including her marriage to Feroze. In one of her letters to her father she opened herself to Nehru as she never had before, in the process revealing the burden a great man’s daughter “…In the past you were (not) ... an approachable being, always so immersed so high up. One feels so inferior when you are about and I suppose that unconsciously one resents it” (170).

It is important to note that Indira’s decision was to marry Feroze to lead a life in anonymity, a life free of turmoil and to have children and care for her children and her husband in a home filled with books, music and friends. But, Nehru drew innumerable plans for her as lists Pupul Jayakar:

“He wanted her to discover India and wanted, gently, slowly but surely to train your mind in that wider understanding of life and events that is essentially for any big work. In this task I wanted to help you personally and I expected you to help me somewhat also..... I have not encouraged anyone and have shouldered my burden alone, for I have always imagined you to occupy that niche. Till you come, that niche had better be kept empty. No one can take your place.”(110, 111; emphasis added)

When Indira expressed her feelings to marry Feroze, Nehru very adamantly said, writes Pupul Jayakar:

Marriage, he suggested, was important, yet marriage was not the whole life. Life is a much bigger thing. It is difficult to understand it. One has to try. Her health was bad and she had to let the doctors decide the timing of her marriage. There is an element of the absurd in your returning from Europe in frail health and suddenly marrying. Emphasizing from over content, he told her that how one something does is as important as the thing itself. (111)
It was only after she had received consent from her Grandmother Rajeshwari Kaul, and later from Mahatma Gandhi had to face her aunts, Pupul notes, “The two ladies were horrified that the young man who had cared for Kamala in the thirties would now want to become a son-in-law of the house….Vijaylakshmi Pandit said to her (Indira), “If you love him you can live with him, but why marriage?” To this Indira replied very simply that she wanted children and companionship” (117).

Ample evidences from the biographies picturize Nehru as a father who has been wanting to draw Indira Gandhi closer into party work, with a particular motive in mind. He was aware that Feroze was ambitious and a well – regarded socialist, devoted to the cause of the nation’s poor and popular among the Congress leaders as an honest man with potential for national leadership. His nomination to the prestigious Constituent Assembly indicated that he was a force to be reckoned with. He would now sit with such eminent people as Ambedkar to frame the Constitution and he was clearly destined to be a Parliamentarian.

It made sense to Nehru that the best way to keep Feroze and Indira emotionally at arm’s length, in his own interest, was to put them-at competition with each other. Mentally he had divorced Feroze from his own family despite the fact that he had two children from Indira. To Nehru, Indira belonged by tradition and training, to him more than to Feroze.

Great minds came to Nehru’s mansion from far and near to seek his advice. But they hardly bothered to probe the might of his daughter or to take her seriously even after she had become Congress President. There was always this comparison between the father and the daughter and Indira was considered as a woman, not of ideas but of instinct.
Describing how Indira Gandhi addressed people Dom Moraes compares her to her father. “Mrs. Gandhi did the same. She went to the peasants and they listened to her, the reincarnation of her father” (137).

Malhotra confirms it: “Nehru loved his daughter, of course, and had high ambitions for her future. But the limit of his ambition was reported to be that Indira would be a minister in Shastri’s cabinet and thus an ‘instrument of continuity’. He could not have foreseen, nor could have anyone else, that Shastri would die so soon. Moreover, whatever Indira might have done in her own time, Nehru was appalled by the very thought of Dynastic succession” (71).

The same author in his second biography on Indira Gandhi writes: “To be sure, it is arguable that Indira might never have become Prime Minister in 1966 were she not Nehru’s daughter. But it is also irrefutable that whatever Nehru’s thoughts about and ambitions for his daughter, he did absolutely nothing to pitchfork her into any position” (Indira 22). All this, perhaps, created in Indira’s mind a disinterest in politics even though she very worried about her future after Feroze’s death. Her close friends Dorothy Norman and Pupul Jayakar felt the injustice of it all. Some even believed that she would have been better off if she weren’t under her father’s ‘shadow’.

Inder Malhotra, viewed Mahatma Gandhi as a frail little man who burst on the Indian scene with cosmic force. He revolutionized Indian politics and shook not only the Nehru household but practically every home and hamlet in the vast and until then dormant nation. Gandhi, eight years younger to Motilal, was, like him, a lawyer. But, unlike Motilal though like his son, Jawaharlal, the newcomer had taken his law degree in England – without in any way becoming anglicized. In 1919, Congress session was to be held at Amritsar; Motilal was
in the chair but Gandhi was the gathering’s moving spirit. Jawaharlal was present, though in a subsidiary and largely silent role. Even so, this was the start of what a British journalist was to call some years, in a – memorable phrase, the ‘Nationalist Trinity of Father, Son and the Holy Ghost’ (Malhotra 34).

Indira was no more than five when she first met the Mahatma. Indira looked upon him ‘not as a great leader but more as an elder in the family to whom she went, with difficulties and problems which he treated with a grave seriousness which was due to the large – eyed and solemn child she was. Gandhi’s call for the boycott of British goods gave Indira her first memory highly political. As Inder Malhotra puts it, “The symbolic burning of foreign clothes had a scaring sequel.” At the comment of a woman relative, Indira returned the lovely frock brought from Paris as a gift and also set fire to the foreign doll that she was passionately attached to. This could be said as her first decision at a tender age resisting her feelings and attending to the call of duty.

In My Truth, she wrote that each person’s understanding of Gandhi is a measure of his own change and growth. She says that while he was alive many of her age group found it difficult to understand him. They took his Mahatmamhood for granted, but quarreled with him for bringing mysticism in politics. “To me Gandhiji is a living man who represents the highest level to which a human being can evolve. Steeped in the best from the past he lived in the present, yet for the future. Hence the timelessness of his highest thoughts” ( 58).

Gandhiji called on the women of India to awake. “If non – violence is the law of our being, the future is with women”. He asked women to come out of their homes to take up the dangerous activity – picketing against the sale of
liquor and the sale of foreign cloth. He warned them that they may be insulted or even injured bodily. But he said, be convinced at your heart that purity shields. Such was the moral authority generated by the great man. Pupul emphasize that by a single call to action Gandhiji freed women from their bondage, their social conditioning and their psychological fears. This freedom to suffer hardships, to conquer fear and to act, gave them inalienable rights; thirty-six years later it would make possible a woman Prime Minister” (26).

Gandhiji’s influence had such a great impact on Kamala, Indira’s mother that she astounded Motilal and his household who otherwise looked down upon her by her energy and her capacity for organized action. An astonished and proud Jawaharlal began to regard his wife anew. This made Indira to enter a new phase of her life of her involvement with the freedom struggle, her rebellious mood toward her school, her desire to wings and fly to Dandi to be with the Mahatma at the center of the excitement.

The biographies speak Tagore’s influence on Indira as paramount. Initially, Indira faced Shantiniketan with trepidation. The reputation built around Tagore and the awe and reverence evident among the people who surrounded him made her hesitant and shy. Indira’s own home at Anand Bhavan was so political that there were wide circle of people who included friends, intellectuals and peasants, freedom fighters and visitors. But there was not much of art and music in her home. So her mind was not prepared for the world of art and poetry that she found in Shantiniketan. Hers was the life spent in the tumult and noise of political life.

In Shantiniketan, she came under the spell of Gurudev and sensed the creative springs that flowed from the poet – philosopher. Shantiniketan was an interlude and an initiation for Indira. For the first time in her life she was in a
quiet place. “The presence on the campus of poets, painters, dancers and literary men from India and across aroused Indira’s latent artistic sensibilities. She relived in Shantiniketan many of the festivals she had celebrated with her grandmother when she was a child” (Pupul 44).

In *My Truth* Indira expresses: “….even the universal has to find an identity of place and nationality, to find a local form and name. That is why the poet was proud of being an Indian while aspiring to be a universal man… Gurudev and my father; neither of them could think of realizing the universal by escaping from his Indian identity” (26).

Indira had many times stressed on the need for spirituality, which for her meant the enrichment of the spirit, the ability to be still in the midst of activity and to be vibrantly alive in moments of calm; to separate the essence from circumstances; to accept joy and sorrow with the same equanimity. Pupul reads Indira’s mind: “We must concern ourselves not only with the world we want, but also the kind of man who should inhabit it” (Pupul 186). Perhaps this philosophy that she imbibed from Gurudev remained throughout her life to transcend the sorrows in her life.

According to the biographers, Feroze Gandhi proposed to Indira since she was sixteen but it was only in 1937 that Indira finally said ‘yes’ on the steps of the Basilica of Sacra – Coeur in Paris. They were opposites in most respects, Feroze’s lower middle class origin contrasted with Indira’s aristocratic background. Nehru’s opposition to or even reservations about Indira’s choice of marriage partner could only mean that he was objecting to Feroze’s relative poverty and the difference in the ‘backgrounds’. But she had made up her mind in spite of her father’s resentment for their marriage.
Biographers’ claim is that Indira’s transformation into an assertive and confident politician made Feroze feel trapped. She was his rival now, not to be won over by a show of masculine strength, care or protection, but only to be beaten in a competition. Inder Malhotra’s states Feroze was generally spoken of as the ‘son – in – law’ of the nation. Good – humored bantering on this score to Feroze’s face tended to turn into downright decision behind his back. Hence, it was not only the conflict of masculinity between man and woman but also between man and man. Feroze is portrayed as a debonair, urban, masculine persona of desirable romantic personality of ‘masculine masquerade’, who transformed himself into a repressed and living on edge, ordinary young man coping with extraordinary circumstances and being physically and emotionally destroyed in the process.

The younger son of Indira Gandhi, Sanjay, could be addressed as an untamed masculinity. Indira’s plan to build her son, as her political heir succeeded beyond all expectations, hers or his. Inder Malhotra: “A brash and extremely tactless young man, Sanjay often treated his mother’s colleagues and other elders churlishly ...Like his mother’s, his word was their command.” According to Malhotra, India was becoming the ‘Land of the Rising Son.’ His adding a few points to Indira’s Twenty – Point Programme, his remarkable knack of attracting ‘dropouts, drifters and roughnecks’ produced its own problems. He and his friends took over the ruling party’s youth wing of which Sanjay was the supreme. Innocent of even elementary norms of political behavior and with their eye on the main chance, they had only two interests: to use their muscle power to prove their loyalty to Sanjay and to grab whatever material gain they could. “Under the circumstances, it was no surprise, though it surely was ironic, that Sanjay became the principal architect of his mother’s misfortunes” (Malhotra 177).
Pupul, states that Sanjay:

…did not inherit from his mother and grandfather their immense empathy for the people of India, their compassion for the poor and underprivileged... he had never suffered, never felt helpless, never known isolation or total despair. He did not inherit from Indira and Jawaharlal the maturity, which led them to doubt or question. He was a rebel against tradition and custom, impatient of rules and procedures... He had no access to that inwardness which led Jawaharlal and Indira to explore the primal wisdom of India, those millennia of heritage. (294)

Sanjay seemed to be the toughest masculinity that Indira as a woman and a mother encountered with. Indira was an Indian mother, passionate, possessive and protective. Pupul Jayakar wonderfully writes:

She (Indira) gave of her love abundantly. At times, seeing the mother and son together, an image from the archaic past of India came to mind, of the hollow – eyed, long-limbed, narrow-hipped figurine from Mehrgarh (2700 BC) where the primal woman cradles a baby to her breasts; no consort appears, nor does he seem necessary. In an epic age, Indira could have been Gandhari of the Mahabharata, for, with her clear, penetrating sight and her capacity to see her through people, she turned away her face, chose to be blind, like Gandhari, to the arrogance and willfulness of her son, and so awakened the lurking furies, those tempestuous Karmic energies that pursued the family and destroy Sanjay (476).

Indira faced a constant mental war in her relationship with Sanjay whom she sought as a friend and her protector but he resulted to be a Pretender. Pupul agrees and says: “In India between the idea and action lie Rivers of twilight within which orders on files are lost, deflected or misinterpreted. Sanjay’s ruthless yet simplistic view of statecraft made the Emergency disasters inevitable (296).
The biographers per se the ‘Syndicate’ called Indira Gandhi a Durga, a Matriarch, who is imperialistic and cold. Indira Gandhi’s syndicate included multiple masculinities with whom Indira had to fight a solitary battle. Gulzarilal Nanda, Morarji Desai and a host of others were a threat to her chosen path of socialism and secularism. They were constantly struck with a fear of getting emasculated when Indira had worked to build her own image and confidence. Her emergence from a shy and withdrawn person to an assertive and confidant politician made them felt trapped; she was their rival. Lal Bahadur Shastri quoted, satirically remarked “Indira is the only man in the Women’s cabinet”. She poses masculinity as a puzzling condition to the men around her – the once desirable attribute now seeming absurd.

Various inferences based on the study of the biographies prove how ‘female masculinity’ or the presence of the male within the female (Kali) can be perceived and valued as exceptional in Indira Gandhi. Graduating from being Lohia’s ‘goongi gudiya’ (dumb doll), Indira Gandhi became Empress of India, Durga astride a tiger, Marie Antonette, Joan of Arc, and finally a martyr. The life sketch of a public figure like Indira Gandhi attests that the moving force behind mass behavior is the creation, perpetuation and preservation of a myth. The myth that interprets being feminine and masculine.

As a ‘woman’ politician Indira Gandhi had little advantages. At first her colleagues tried to manipulate her, refused to take her seriously, till she proved her mastery over the political process and defeated them on their own ground. After that they lost contact with her and relationships were broken. The political male domination would have, perhaps, created a negative behavior of destructive nature in her. She had to transform herself to take decisions totally alien to the hitherto well – established male idea of politics. In Indian politics, she had to adopt those masculine traits that were more desirable and would help
an individual to achieve success in society. Thus, she paved her way into an ‘androgy nous society’ where both women and men would combine the characteristics that are now considered stereotypically masculine and those that are considered feminine.

Trained under the methodology of androcentrism, the male biographers assert the assumption that Indira Gandhi was a Durga, a Matriarch, and an Authoritarian ruler. This was the result of the fact that she could not be accepted as a ‘woman’ who was mentally strong, competitive, rational, unemotional and objective as these traits are advanced as typical indexical markers of softness, emotionality and nurturing are seen as wanting in comparison. She has been accused of monopolized charisma and paid the price for it when she had no readymade protection such as Nehru had carefully nurtured. They found her, to some extent, no match to her father. Her female biographers showed a closer examination of the masculine in relationship to the feminine, and the masculine as an aspect of relationships between men. They attributed her rising as one of history’s most powerful and significant leaders, to her winning of a constant battle in the huge, complex, male-dominated country by breaking orthodoxies and myths.

**Political Power Entrusted To A ‘Woman’: Indira Gandhi:**

When one group rules another, the relationship between the two is political. When such an arrangement is carried over a long period of time it develops an ideology (feudalism, racism, etc.). All historical civilizations are patriarchies: their ideology is male supremacy.(Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* 111)

Despite Indira Gandhi’s involvement in the national politics right from her childhood and despite her pioneering role in the history and culture of Indian politics, why was Indira Gandhi’s way into her political life, a personal
struggle? Is it because men and women appear to have very different goals and schema for the nation?

Based on the biographers’ claim, Indira Gandhi entered into politics with disinclination. But, the fact relics, that she remained in the not so ‘feminine’ domain for nearly two decades ruling over one sixth of world’s population at that time. Winning the leadership of the largest party in parliament was not an easy course for Indira Gandhi. It was a solitary battle for a woman to head to totally male – dominated sphere of Indian politics. Recounting the life of Indira Gandhi, provides revealing insights into the psyche of the woman and into the psyche of India itself. Attempting to cull the anecdotes from her biographies, it is appealing to observe the rise and tumultuous rule of Indira Gandhi. Indira Gandhi made her way to real Indian Politics in the year 1959.

Pupul Jayakar called the ‘Syndicate’ a loose body of Congressmen made up of all shades of opinion, from all parts of the country. The Congress Power machine was corrupt and inefficient and needed to be renewed; the ministers ballooned their fortunes forgetting the spirit of liberation for which the Congress fought and obtained independence. Inder Malhotra commented that the Syndicate and Congress Ministry’s concern was more on its fate in the next elections for its stability and that this moribund Congress party needed cleansing.

The dominant figurative thinking of the Syndicate is masculine and their male concepts play an assertive role and female concepts are either totally non – existent or wherever present, they play subordinate and passive role. It is predominantly masculine in character. It is a male monopolized institution which has adopted patriarchal framework and has imposed on its members prescribed roles and behavior patterns. Indira Gandhi had to pave her way
through such a society which made laws to suit to men’s advantage. This needed to employ such strategies that would let her take a swing upward. To establish this fact, an analysis of a few situations is necessary which show how inaccurate male assessments on women can be.

The biographical evidences claim that Nehru had groomed his daughter for political life and yet at crucial times he showed distinct traces of Victorian notions. According to Frank, he held her shrewd political sense, passion, and determination in political maneuver in doubt as he tried to reinforce her in a traditional woman’s role of a “caretaker”. Frank states: “Nehru knew that his daughter was knowledgeable and reliable; but he saw her as an assistant rather than a confidante or adviser. Indira was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with this subordinate role.” (239). “He viewed her as an adjunct to himself – not as a politically independent being, and ... he underestimated her intelligence” (250). “Certainly he had relied on her heavily. But there was no disguising the fact that Indira had not lived up to the promise had envisioned and articulated as ‘a child of storm and trouble’, the participant in a new revolution” (277). But, Pupul states “Rumours abounded that is was Jawaharlal Nehru who had maneuvered to get his daughter elected” (156).

As a reply Krishna Hutheesing words are very apt. As she writes “In February, 1956, Indira was elected president of the congress. Some said that Jawahar was responsible for elevating her to the Presidency. This was untrue, for he firmly believed that a position should be earned by reason of merit, and not by reason of relationship. Indira, was the fourth woman to head the party, so it was nothing new” (142).

As Indira’s tenure of the office of president of the congress drew to a close, the working committee tried to persuade Indira to stand for re – election.
She declined. In February 1960, Kamraj Nadar was elected president. Krishna Hutheesing states:

Congress leaders began to wonder if he was well enough to carry the burden of his office. Rumors spread about various possible successors. There was talk of a syndicate of leaders: Would X, Y and Z take over the government? British and American journalists played up cries of “After Nehru, who?” and “After Nehru, what?” (148).

The biographers agree to the monopolistic set up of Indian politics. Even Indira was aware that the Congress Stalwarts underestimated her. The Indian politics was so conditioned with their male chauvinism that they were not willing even to consider Indira Gandhi as a possible claimant. As Pupul states:

What was Indira’s purpose? To drain power from the political leadership in the states and concentrate it at the Centre in the hands of the Prime Minister; to clear the way for her own prime ministership? Her record as Congress President had brought her to the forefront of Congress politics, but she was aware that the Congress stalwarts underestimated her. They were so conditioned in their male chauvinism that they were not willing even to consider her as a possible claimant. No woman, they felt, could have the stamina, which a Prime Minister needed, to rule the country. But, unfortunately for Indira, the follow – up action necessary to create a new power structure could not materialize, because of the sudden illness of her father, hardly four months after the Kamaraj Plan had gone into action. (167)

The question of succession came up immediately with Nehru’s death, Kamaraj was in Delhi. Gulzari Lal Nanda, then Home Minister, had been sworn in as interim Prime Minister, and Lal Bahadur Shastri’s name along with Gulzari Lal Nanda’s were discussed as possible Prime Ministers. Pupul states:

The ‘Syndicate’; a loose body or congressmen made up of all shades of opinion, from all parts of the country, and critical of
Nehru during his last days, chosen Shastri as the next prime minister. (170)

Shastri was unanimously elected leader of the congress party and invited to form a government. As, Krishna Hutheesing writes: “Shastri asked Indira to take over the Foreign Ministry. She declined the offer; But Shastri was not to be put off. He offered her other ministerial posts. The daughter of Nehru, he said would lend prestige to his cabinet and makes it easier for him to carry on.” (156; emphasis added)

Indira became a cabinet minister over the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. During her ministry, Indira brought into ministry consultants and specialist to the Ministry, and saw to it that their advice was implemented. Pupul states: “Indira Gandhi’s political instincts were alive and active. Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri sensing this prevented her access to his inner councils, although she was on all the political committees” (171).

India was profoundly shocked. The country mourned the loss of the second Prime Minister in their history, who had been in office only eighteen months. Kamaraj was worried and deeply concerned as to who could be the next Prime Minister. He was certain that Morarji Desai would contest the election and he could not think of any candidate who could defeat Desai. Pupul registers what Kamaraj had as his plan, Kamaraj said, ‘We will have Indira as Prime Minister.’ Kamaraj further said:

She knows all the world leaders, has travelled widely with her father, has grown up amongst the great men of the freedom movement, has a rational and modern mind, is totally free of any parochialism – state, caste or religion. She has possible inherited her father’s scientific temper and above all in 1967 election she can win the election (176-177).
The following references do confirm the male perception of superiority demonstrated in politics. Nehru’s poor assessment of Indira gave her the guilt, anger and pain that she had failed her father in some fundamental way (Frank: 277). She was disappointed and weary of decorative and adjunct activities; and if she is claimed to have initiated ‘Kamaraj Plan’ (Pupul 119) it was a strategy adopted: To counteract the male underestimation of a woman. And a move to deny any single person a claim to the Prime Minister ship after Nehru.

A few of the following references would establish the fact that Lal Bahadur Shastri, a senior leader and prime minister after Nehru’s death, feared the political instinct of Indira Gandhi and sensing this, prevented her access to his inner councils, although she was on all the political committees (Pupul 123). Shastri wanted her in the Cabinet but not in position of power (Frank 280). Her voluntary mission in tackling Tamil Nadu riots and infiltration into Kashmir earned her more appreciation and popularity. This, indirectly earned Shastri a reputation of becoming a national hero over night. Ironically this created a negative effect. He started ignoring her. Shastri knew that the presence in his government of Nehru’s daughter would lend it strength. But while being a good man with genuinely modest demeanor, he was also a tough and wily politician who knew how to safeguard his interests. He did not want a potential rival in his team (Malhotra 83).

From the perspective of the then “President Radhakrishnan , Indira was an artless woman. He thought little of her intellectual achievements ... realized she had the outer facade necessary for a Prime Minister of India” (Pupul 127). Kamaraj saw in her shy exterior and reticence a Prime Minister who could be manipulated (Pupul 127). The syndicate and the Congress chief ministers were thinking more about the next General Election ... without the magic personality of Nehru. This is what clinched the issue in Indira’s favor (Malhotra 87).
Therefore the oppression that she faced seemed to be the handiwork of a collective of powerful Congress party. Dom Moreas in his own style states:

Mrs. Gandhi, a woman whose life has been the exact opposite of Desai’s, had learnt quickly in the early days of her rule. She owed something to the Syndicate but she was not willing to play at Puppets. She now proceeded to assert herself. In parliament her shyness was still with her, and she was sometimes hesitant and unconfident when confronted by sharp questions: from the opposition: but away from the clamorous floor, quiet and small behind her desk, she made her decisions….. The public felt that a new and inexperienced prime minister had been terrified into acceptance of Sikh demands….. In June 1966… she devalued the rupee. The syndicate was very angry, very angry, and in November their anger turned into utter fury. (130-131; emphasis added)

A feminist perspective helps to highlight on some of the considerations that are mentioned below and attempts to discover the patriarchal mindset that reduces a woman’s role into subordination. According to her biographers within a few months of her Prime Ministership, Indira Gandhi was facing opposition, not only from the Syndicate bosses of the Congress but also from some of her own Cabinet Ministers, all of whom opposed her intention to inject revolutionary socialistic programs. Soon she was expected to follow the legacy that was formed by her male predecessors. Pupul Jayakar shares something near to Indira Gandhi made her capable for the work she plunged into.

Pupul states:

Her political advisers offered their suggestions but she kept her options open and refused to reveal her mind. There was something special in the manner in which Indira Gandhi confronted a major crisis… While she turned, her ear was open, tuned in to remarks which otherwise would have gone unnoticed. She observed people’s faces, their glances their gestures – out of this conversation of her resources, when the time was right, she struck
when it was least expected. Her action flew straight as an arrow and was lethal (207).

In the same manner, Dom moreas says:

Obviously neither I nor anyone else has seen Mr. Gandhi by herself. Until something said interest her, a chance shot flying into her thoughts, she is politely attentive yet completely relaxed but there is a frail tense quality in the poised body, like a bird about to fly: to fly back into the eyrie of her own mind…. I would think, completely without frivolity that from time to time Mrs. Gandhi feels the need to have around her new voices not to listen to… Another reason for Indira to collect people around her was her insecurity (155).

Katherine Frank, very minutely sketches the socio-political scene of India when Indira Gandhi took up the reins of the Government. It was a time when two wars in less than three years and two leadership successors over half that period brought strain enough on a vast land in the formative stages of becoming a nation state. It was also a time of great economic crisis, a severe drought, famine and acute food crisis facing the nation. The bureaucrats around her were cynical, concerned with guarding their own positions. Chronic shortage of foreign exchange making import of grain impossible, student agitations, food riots, the Naga revolt, the language issue in the South, the Sikh demand for a Punjabi – speaking province, the dismal international relations were the major adverse circumstances she had to face.

According to Katherine Frank “Indira was everything Desai was not, but for her Congress bosses, her greatest asset was her weakness, or more accurately, their perception that she was weak” (290). As per the evaluation of the biographers the choice of Indira Gandhi was actually a negative decision provoked by Kamaraj and his followers whose perception of Indira Gandhi was
that, she lacked administrative experience and ‘She was a woman.’ The Syndicate thought Indira Gandhi would do their bidding, that they could run the show, by remote control. “They would thereby enjoy ‘that rarest form of political power’ which gives the privileges of decision without its responsibilities….. Indira was merely a ‘vote catching device’. After the elections if she would take or they would make her take a back seat” (Frank 290).

Indira Gandhi’s courage was epic. She dared, refused to be intimidated whatever the odds. As Dom Moreas states “not only did she have enemies behind her, silent and full of cold fury: the Syndicate and Desai, and the rightist elements in the congress. She was determined that she would not be replaced, that she would break the Syndicate, and that unlike her mother she would not allow herself to be broken” (157).

Since, Indira Gandhi entered a male domain, as she broke the public / private dichotomy, started facing the encroachment of men in all forms. As Pupul Jayakar quotes L .K. Jha who notes:

Indira Gandhi was very diffident, almost incompetent as a parliamentarian. She would have the prepared text, she would go through it carefully, study every word, but while she was speaking, someone would deliberately interrupt and ask her some side questions, to see whether she could revert to her text after interruption. This embarrassed her. Ram Manohar Lohia, one of her father’s protégés referred to her incapacity for quick repartee. He called her a “gungi gudia” – a dumb doll. (137; emphasis added)

Inder Malhotra alleges that “in Parliament she was now even more inarticulate and nervous. She was tongue – tied and apparently unable to think on her feet. Things may not have been so bad , had the opposition shown her the
kind of indulgence usually extended to a new Prime Minister” (93). But to our bewilderment the same author confesses:

In my earlier biography, for instance, I had gone along with the generally accepted view that not only was her formal education episodic and limited but also she had little interests in books or ideas but liked to go by her usually unfailing instinct. What corrected me was the publication in 1990 of Two Alone, Two Together. It is a collection of letters exchanged between her and her father from 1922 to 1964, I was stunned by the discovery that from her days as a student Indira had been a voracious reader and remained so till the end….Sharada Prasad, her principal speechwriter during her long reign as Prime Minister, could possibly write a whole book on the prodigious trouble Indira Gandhi took to correct, rewrite and refine both the language and the content of her speeches. He once said to me, in all seriousness, that she was the “best sub–editor in the world”. Indira Gandhi could be silent and aloof whenever she wanted to be, the underlying impression that she was “solemn”, “severe” and “forbidding” is utterly wrong. Besides excluding charm, she was scintillating conversationalist, witty and with a sense of humour. (Indira 184; emphasis added)

Nayantara Sahgal details Indira Gandhi’s emergence as a politician, in the real sense, vividly in the chapter “Emergence—1967- 1969”. She states:

The press and the public automatically identified her with her father, until marked differences of political style and behavior became obvious and finally erupted into the open in 1969. The overt likenesses were there, and she cultivated them. She had adopted his mannerism of flinging back garlands she received to delighted observers, especially children, and of delving into a crowd to find out for herself what was happening. Her speech from the Red Fort on August 15, 1967, an annual event, was patterned on Nehru’s own. Mrs. Gandhi, who made an awkward impression as a public speaker on formal occasions before discerning audiences, when her delivery of a written speech was flat, came into her own before a crowd where she was fluent and emphatic….Though she was still “Nehru’s daughter” to the country, Mrs. Gandhi’s style showed differences from his, some of them fundamental in outlook and value (35-36).
Even Pupul marked the change, as she says:

The year had transformed Indira, she was no longer the shy young woman who walked two steps behind her father, seemingly seeking his protection. Her years as president of the congress and the way she had to face her loneliness after the death of Feroze had given her a silent, yet assured confidence (162).

All the biographers unanimously admit that the period of the Emergency was the defining moment in the history of independent India, and that Indira Gandhi had brought India into an apocalypse. In their view, donning the role of a dictator, she made Indian democracy take an extended leave of absence between June 1975 and January 1977. Indira Gandhi became a patriarch by herself.

Observing Indira Gandhi on the Red Fort, addressing vast numbers of men and women on the August 15th morning during the Emergency period, Pupul Jayakar sensed “The timber of her voice was strained as if she was suppressing powerful emotions. The speech was rambling. Her capacity to reach out, to touch the hearts of people, to draw them close to her so that communication reached beyond the word that voice had deserted her” (288). Within seconds, Indira Gandhi told Pupul “I have not acted with a happy heart. One has to at times take a hard step, to drink bitter medicine” (288).

Judging by what was happening in the country soon after the blow of the Emergency fell, Inder Malhotra wrote: “Not only was there no resistance or even visible opposition to the Emergency, it was also rather popular with the people at large, in the initial months at least, underscoring once again that the Indian people are both anarchy-loving and authority – loving” (135). This set out to prove that Indira Gandhi simply adapted a ‘male supremacist ideology of
rationality’ validating the concept of power as domination and control and exercised it. People, being socially trained to internalize. It is a known fact that marginalized people, especially women are socially trained to internalize.

Again, Inder Malhotra, in his second biography on Indira Gandhi, corrects his own statement:

In my earlier biography of Indira Gandhi, I had called the Emergency “her worst and most catastrophic mistake, indeed her cardinal sin”, and I stood by the verdict for years, if only because grim memories of the Emergency regime’s outrages were still fresh. Equally important, the poison injected into the system by the Emergency was taking an excruciatingly long time to be flushed out of the body politic. The passage of time has, however, lent perspective to the past events and made it possible to take a more dispassionate view of them than was the case even a few years ago….More Indians than ever before are inclined to agree that if Indira did sin, politically speaking, she was also being sinned against. (Indira 126; emphasis added)

Pupul Jayakar in an impulsive manner states “Indira made grave mistakes; the intelligentsia never forgave her for the Emergency. In essence they never forgave themselves for their silence and the fear that enveloped them; for their incapacity to act – except for a handful people – to fight her with the same degree of courage and fearlessness. But, if she sinned, ‘she sinned bravely’ (475).

What Indira Gandhi publicly acknowledges during the Emergency phase and what not in the chapter ‘Drastic, Emergent Action’: Katherine Franks states:

Indira Gandhi claimed that she had been besieged on all sides. The right, the left, Hindu extremists, Naxalite terrorists and a myriad of other ‘elements’ were all hellbent on destroying the law of the land. The enemy was diverse, but it was led by the ‘fascist’ JP movement, backed, Indira maintained, by ‘a foreign hand’. She
paradoxically argued that the only way to safeguard and preserve Indian democracy ….The Emergency was an extreme remedy – an authoritarian vaccine to protect the country against a virulent anti – democratic virus. What Indira did not publicly acknowledge was that she also had serious ‘enemies within’ – the dissidents in her Congress Party. (382)

As quoted in Inder Malhotra’s *Indira Gandhi*, a premier sociologist, Andre Beteille, writing in “Economic and Politically Weekly (EPW)” noted that for larger sections of the Indian intelligentsia, if Indira Gandhi was the villain of the Emergency, Jay Prakash Narayan was its hero; He disagreed with this and argued persuasively that the “anarchy” that JP was promoting in the name of “total revolution” and the abuse of power” by the Prime Minister, especially her son Sanjay, were but “two sides of the same coin” (127).

In a similar tone Pupul Jayakar states: “In India between the idea and action lie rivers of twilight, within which orders on files are lost, deflected or misinterpreted. Sanjay’s ruthless yet simplistic view of statecraft made the Emergency disasters inevitable” (296).

The post – effect of emergency on Indira as Pupul states:

“She was not prepared to face herself or acknowledge a heritage that had straightened her spine, given her resilience and an inviolable dignity. No one, including Indira, looked on Sanjay Gandhi as little more. Yet her need for support from someone she could trust totally made her turn to Sanjay on all matters for advice and sustenance”. (291)

Her biographies reveal that the emergency period had evoked a psychological trauma in the people, which was deeply embedded to be erased. Demonstrators shouted, “Death to Indira” “Down with the queen of Corruption” and waved black flags. Within a couple of years after Emergency, she was
turned out of her office in a massive political defeat. Dom Moreas states “after the defeat, she could not bear total loneliness: she came back into politics, she collected new people around her, created new worlds to destroy ….from the defeat came the continual outcries against the Janta Party as the persecutors of a lonely and defenceless woman” (313). But in 1980, in the most astonishing political turnaround in modern India she returned to her power. At this juncture Pupul Jayakar, states:

This was her fourth swearing – in as Prime Minister. In 1966, she was apprehensive. In 1967, with a reduced majority in the Lok Sabha and the old guard of the Congress determined to obstruct her in every way and to force her out of the prime ministership, she was grim. In 1971, she was filed with a wild euphoria. In 1980, she was somber, without a trace of her imperious arrogance. (399)

A sequel of the years of Indira Gandhi’s Prime Ministership till death. In the first few years of her Prime Ministership, Indira could act with courage and defiance and had the driving force to see that her plans took root in the country. Pupul states “The stronger the opposition, the more supple the sinews of her body and the swifter her insights for political action” (476).

Indira Gandhi established her own image world wide. The years that followed, the period of Emergency and her defeat at the polls demanded great resilience in her to survive. Back to power in the Eighties, there was an edge to her mind in spite of her growing age, a determination to fulfill many unfinished tasks. Indira was firmly entrenched in the belief that she and the lineage from which she came were the instruments for the transformation of India. In Sanjay Gandhi, Indira had identified the force, the person and the energy to act out her vision for the future. As a woman Pupul reads a woman and says:
“Indira was fifty – seven years old, a precarious age for a woman. The tides of her body were arhythmic. She suffered from a sever horomonic imbalance which made it difficult for her to come to terms with the body’s new emanations. Throughout her life whenever challenged, her back to the wall, she had let go, slepted back, fallow…. But now confronted with a moment which called for the convergence of every resource within agility, the capacity to be three steps, ahead of her opponents. Her mind was tossed hither and thither; the doorway to her inner reserves closed. There as no space for her to step back. Her capacity to listen and observe to enter into situations, was at its lowest ebb. She turned to her favoured son, Sanjay, and energy from the youth ... Sanjay became her ears and eyes. (292)

The biographers note: During 1976, Sanjay launched his Five – Point programme with an uncanny skill he identified social and cultural problems, the solution to which would revolutionize India: family planning, tree planting, a ban on dowry, Each one – Teach one, and the end of casteism. But to Indira Gandhi it turned very destructive. As Pupul states:

Indira saw in Sanjay dynamism and a determination that would enable him to act with strength .... But she misjudged her own capabilities; the country was vast, complex, her son self – willed and arrogant. In giving him the freedom to advise and initiate action, she released a destructive energy that became uncontrollable. (295)

A Personal tragedy shattered Indira Gandhi’s life. Sanjay’s death left Indira shrunken. Indira was aware of the divisive forces that were active in the country. Major movements were taking place, violence was on the increase. Inder Malhotra says “Indira Gandhi had known all along that when she authorized Operation Bluestar she had also signed her own death warrant” (181). All through October 1984 the thought of a violent death was very much on her mind. Indira discussed it also. Her memorable last speech at Bhubaneswar in Orissa, two days before her assassination speaks for itself.
Inder Malhotra quotes her words: “When I die every single drop of my blood will invigorate the nation and strengthen united India” (182).

Indira Gandhi was adored by millions of Indian people through her devotion to nation. She was elevated to god-like stature as a new Durga, as the new empress of India during her reign. Yet her extra curricular philanthropic work for her country is known to get less credit. People see a woman’s love for humanity as more natural function for the gender. Men, meanwhile, get more credit for the same work because it is not seen as a typical ‘masculine’ quality.

A meticulous analysis of her biographies affirms that gender bias brings discrimination even into the lives of educated women belonging to the most privileged families too. Evidences from Indira Gandhi’s biographies suggest that a strong gender bias pervades in the political arena and even the upper class and the upper caste society does not escape from getting victimized. These attitudinal and hidden biases against women are powerful forces against efficient women’s participation in politics and nation building.

Postcolonial constructs of ‘new women’ has only reshaped the gender bias and resulted in all kinds of exploitation and discriminatory practices. A close reading of biographical works of Indira Gandhi highlights the existence of big gap between what Indira Gandhi was and what the actual politics that had painted her into. This resulted in facts getting fictionalized. Such unjust portrayals of women not only discourage but also threaten the other women to claim and enjoy their basic rights. This leads the majority of women to lead passive and powerless lives. This deters them from finding the right means and methods to overcome the injustices and to create anew social order where there will be justice for the feminine gender. As already mentioned earlier the life story of great woman leader, Mrs. Indira Gandhi will only be read as a
cautionary tale as facts about her life are masked into fictions which appear as threatening to other women. Such a misreading will discourage the other women from emulating her as a role model. Today the image of such an outstanding politician slowly vanishes into oblivion.

All the biographers, at one point or the other, wondered at the strength and courage of the significant leader who had been able to reach the pinnacle of political power in a country that is a male dominated bastion. The thought uppermost in the minds of all the biographers seems to go in tune with the twentieth century’s popular belief that political success is a masculine achievement. Evidently, every biographer condemned her proclamation of Emergency as a thoughtless act, bringing in a ‘dark period’ in the history of Indian democracy, and also attributed her winning back the confidence of people to femininity, thereby, supporting the thought that “ruthlessness is being unfeminine”, in other words,” rationality without feeling is masculinity.”

bell hooks, in her “Feminist Theory -from margin to center, 2000,” is in support of the arguments that - As long as women equate emancipation of women with an imitation of men and a fierce determination to acquire their behavior pattern, they will have no understanding of the damage they do to themselves and they do to others. If women should create new and different value system from that of men, they would not endorse domination and control over others under any circumstances, they will not accept the belief that ‘might makes right’. If women can re-conceptualize power, they will not simply aspire to gain equality with man. Women can force to surface the elements of strength within them- confidence, assertiveness and decision – making ability. Gender, becomes a system of power.
Radical thinkers and activists assert that the breakdown of public/private dichotomy would lead to a redefinition of politics to include everyday struggles and power relations to reclaim women as politically active. The subordinated position of women in politics is tied to gender as a value and a system of power that affects the understanding practice, and study of politics. Political institutions and social practice; are gendered and privilege men over women.

Thus, to obtain a better understanding of politics there is a need to incorporate gender and draw on women’s activities as well as men’s and the ways they have influenced and shaped politics. Representation is not mere image; it needs to engage in a whole process which results in the making of this image. In this chapter, the focus was on the specific issues within the studies of gender. These inferences will contribute to an understanding of the ways in which masculine dominance is practiced upon or resisted by women. How the male and female biographer endeavor to make up the image of Indira Gandhi and not just mere representation.

Most crucial in any study of ‘woman’ as the biographical subject is the analysis of the biographers’ point of view. Trained under the methodology of androcentricism, the male biographers assert the assumption that Indira Gandhi was a Durga, a matriarch, and an authoritarian ruler. This was the result of the fact that she could not be accepted as a woman; the presence of male within the female. Both Inder Malhotra and Dom Moreas accused Indira Gandhi that she had monopolized charisma and paid the price for it, they depicted her through a microscopic lens, at the same time regretted after misrepresentation that, Indira Gandhi as a ‘woman’ was no match to her father. Both the male biographers are the spokesperson of the androcentric world. Indira Gandhi transformed herself to establish herself in the male idea of politics, but the male biographers grapple very hard with the breaking of traditional Sita image a woman dependant on
male character and an image of a liberated Indian woman of new India. Reading through the biographies of Inder Malhotra and Dom Moreas one can not fail to perceive the androcentric thinking, their text cannot camouflage the ‘body trap’. Literature is male; thereby men writers assume that the ‘readers’ are male.

In the same way the female biographers, Katherine Frank and Pupul Jayakar illustrates a closer examination of the persona of Indira Gandhi. Compared to the male biographers, female biographers’ sketch of Indira Gandhi is more appropriate and less scientific, that is to see biography as a ‘kaleidoscope’: each time you look you see something rather different, composed certainly of the same elements, but in a new pattern. A close reading of both the female biographers, affirm the fact less acceptable to the male writers that Indira rising as one of history’s most powerful and significant leaders, to her winning of a constant battle in the huge complex, male-dominated country by breaking orthodoxies and myths.

Hence, the reading of Indira Gandhi’s biographies within the frame work of ‘new biography’ opens up new avenues for a careful study of research into a woman’s biography. As already stated, gender will always, in some way be central to an understanding of a woman’s life.


